



Saint Cyprian of Carthage

Epistles of Cyprian

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Epistles of Cyprian of Carthage

Little is known of the early history of Thascius Cyprian (born probably about 200 A.D.) until the period of his intimacy with the Carthaginian presbyter Cæcilius, which led to his conversion A.D. 246. That he was born of respectable parentage, and highly educated for the profession of a rhetorician, is all that can be said with any degree of certainty. At his baptism he assumed the name of his friend Cæcilius, and devoted him self, with all the energies of an ardent and vigorous mind, to the study and practice of Christianity. His ordination and his elevation to the episcopate rapidly followed his conversion. With some resistance on his own part, and not without great objections on the part of older presbyters, who saw themselves superseded by his promotion, the popular urgency constrained him to accept the office of bishop of Carthage [A.D. 248], which he held until his martyrdom [A.D. 258]. The writings of Cyprian, apart from their intrinsic worth, have a very considerable historical interest and value, as illustrating the social and religious feelings and usages that then prevailed among the members of the Christian community. Nothing can enable us more vividly to realize the intense convictions-the high-strained enthusiasm which formed the common level of the Christian experience, than does the indignation with which the prelate denounces the evasions of those who dared not confess, the lapses of those who shrank from martyrdom. Living in the atmosphere of persecution, and often in the immediate presence of a lingering death, the professors of Christianity were nerved up to a wonderful contempt of suffering and of worldly enjoyment, and saw every event that occurred around them in the glow of their excited imagination; so that many circumstances were sincerely believed and honestly recorded, which will not be for a moment received as true by the calm and critical reader. The account given by Cyprian in his treatise on the Lapsed may serve as an illustration, p. 368, vol. i. Of this Dean Milman observes: "In what a high wrought state of enthusiasm must men have been, who could relate and believe such statements as miraculous!" -Summary by Robert Ernest Wallis. As with all historical texts, the language used in this volume should be interpreted within the context of the entire work and the cultural context of its publication. - David Ronald

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